

## **The Latest for WEDNESDAY November 18TH 2009**

### **Fire Services Daily Newsletter**

<http://www.montana.edu/wwwfire/daily.php>

#### **Letter from IM**

An open letter to the Montana fire service community:

For the last four years, Interoperability Montana has undertaken the task of building an interoperable radio communications system for Montana's public safety and emergency services. Interoperable communications have been identified as a priority for public safety by Governor Schweitzer and by Montana's Statewide Interoperability Executive Council, which has existed since 2004.

In recent months, we have heard directly—and indirectly—from members of Montana's fire service community about their concerns regarding the interoperable "trunked" system that IM is constructing. We've also read the letters published in this forum from fire leaders in Gallatin and Cascade Counties. These concerns are not new to us. In fact, Fort Ellis Fire Chief Fred Cady shared them with us in person at our Bozeman outreach meeting on August 18.

In the past three months, we also have listened to members of the fire community at other outreach meetings across Montana. In all, IM made more than 40 presentations in locations ranging from county commissioner and city council chambers to search and rescue headquarters to libraries to fire halls. Those meetings, including the one in Bozeman, brought IM valuable information about the perceptions of our project.

We also heard the questions and concerns of people who might use the system. While it is never easy to hear criticism of one's efforts, those comments pointed out shortcomings in our past information and education outreach. They also have shown us where we need to focus those efforts.

To that end, let me be clear on three points that I have made repeatedly in our outreach meetings:

\*IM will not force any jurisdiction to join the system, use the system or pay into it. That includes fire departments and fire districts, many of which already operate on shoestring budgets and have no taxing authority.

\*We are not out to get a trunked radio into the hands of every fire fighter in Montana. In fact, I've said many times during our outreach tour that not every fire fighter needs a trunked radio. However, one or two mobile units in command vehicles might be useful for communication with other disciplines or agencies. While we can't recommend one radio over another, we are trying to provide more information about radios through our website so that fire departments and other public safety people can make more informed decisions about radio purchases.

\*I've heard multiple times that fire fighters always are looking for "one more tool." For fire services, IM simply is another communications tool, one that is most likely to be used by commanders as they share information with others at their level.

In the coming weeks, IM will develop an informational effort especially for the fire services community. Fire fighters have plenty of questions about radios, about trunking, about operating procedures and about the IM system itself; we plan to answer all of them and clearly state what IM can do for fire fighters, and what it cannot do.

We also will share the comments received at our outreach meetings (including the ones criticizing or challenging the IM project) with the hundreds of people who shared their e-mail addresses with us. IM will use those comments to develop a new sustainability plan that will reflect the comments we heard. Our goal is to create a plan that can have broad support among local governments and public safety disciplines.

We could not have reached this point without the input we received from fire fighters and from so many other people across Montana. Thank you for your questions and your opinions. We also are willing to come to fire council meetings and have a more detailed conversation about IM.

As noted in our outreach program, we take seriously our responsibility to prove the IM system works and to encourage more users as it grows. We also take seriously our commitment to foster an ongoing two-way dialogue and increase the level of trust with local jurisdictions and disciplines, including the fire services.

Best wishes,  
Kevin Bruski  
Executive Director, Interoperability Montana  
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